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Toward Reclaiming an Authentic Biblical-Christian View of the Body

by

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I. General Overview: The Biblical Anthropology is Neither Greek nor Modern

Perhaps the single most important fact about the Biblical theology of the body is that the human body is viewed as integral to the human person, and not as a mere external shell. Simply stated, the Biblical anthropology is not Hellenistic (i.e., Greek). Man is perceived in the Biblical anthropology to be an "animated body", created by God as an undivided unity. Man is indivisible, essentially one. He is not, as in the Hellenistic view, a duality of "body and soul", divisible and opposed to one another. His body is not viewed as alien, accidental, bad, or as mere external form to an immortal spiritual component. This is true of Paul, too, though at one time it was popular to say that Paul had adopted the Greek anthropology. Essentially the New Testament view is the same as the Old, though there are nuances and refinements there to basic Old Testament concepts.

One cannot overemphasize that the Biblical view is not the Greek one. Many modern American Christians have superimposed the Greek notion of

man on the Biblical notion, and as a result man is often viewed as a duality, that is, as a soul trapped in a body that is liberated at death, and that at death the real person emerges, so that eternal life is strictly spiritual. Many Americans, for example, take the anthropology of the famous Christmas movie classic "It's a Wonderful Life" to be the Christian (and therefore Biblical) view, namely, that human beings literally become angels when they die. When I poll my sophomore college students, many of whom are pre-med, about what the resurrection of Christ means, most of them, including the 85% who have gone to Catholic high schools, think it means that when Christ rose from the dead, He put off His human body forever – and with it His humanity – so that He sits at the Right Hand of the Father only in His divinity and only "as a spiritual entity".¹ When I explain to my students that the resurrection means the resurrection of the body, which means that the whole person in his full humanity, body and soul, is raised from the dead, they really are incredulous.² They do not believe that such is the Christian (or Biblical) view, even though they claim to be Christians raised in Christian households! They usually think that the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul freed from the body forever is the Biblical-Christian teaching. Never mind trying to point out the profound implications of such a reality: that once the Son of God becomes Incarnate God has wedded humanity, body and all, to Him forever. The implications of rejecting the true Biblical-Christian teaching are equally as important.

Grasping this key Biblical reality – or failing to – brings with it other theological implications of course. The resurrection of the body implies that for the human person the body is essential to his personhood and is not accidental to his humanity. In the Biblical view, man, even in the next world, cannot be a complete human person without his body. It is as simple as that. For the Biblical mindset, the human person is an animated body and no other form of human life is conceived of. So any Biblical notion of the resurrection could *only* be bodily. This is how the disciples would have heard Jesus and what the Apostles preached about Him. Moreover, the incarnation means that the Son of God became fully human and died in that full humanity, that is, including in His human body. Although the risen Christ has a glorified human body, the fact that He does not discard it even in His ascension to Heaven has serious and profoundly joyful implications for the fundamental meaning and worth of the human body, especially relevant for our modern American culture.

The resurrection was a "scandal to the Jews" because of the disgrace to Jesus' body in crucifixion. It was "folly to the Greeks" that the body would have immortality along with the soul. It appears as incredible to the modern Christian youth because they have uncritically adopted the

prevailing cultural view that the body is wholly unconnected to one's true identity.³ When they learn what the Biblical-Christian theology of the body entails and implies, however, they begin to have the means for criticizing the prevailing cultural view and they can begin to move intentionally toward a more consistent integrated lifestyle and a different attitude to what they do in and with their bodies.⁴ If the Christian churches can reclaim the true Biblical-Christian view of the body (and the resurrection), then this will help arm the youth in our parishes against nihilistic and materialist views of the body. At the very least, they will recognize what the authentic Christian teaching is. Hopefully they will gain an appreciation for some of the implications of that teaching, for sexual and medical ethics if not for daily living. Toward that end, this paper will present an overview of the Biblical view of the body and then draw out some implications for engaging the popular attitudes in our culture.⁵

To begin with, then, the Biblical mindset is that man is one, indivisible being: if his spirit goes to eternal life or damnation, so does his body. In a sense, in the Biblical view, man does not possess a body, he *is* a body (albeit animated). The Biblical view is that immortality is not promised to a soul separated from the body, but to the whole integral person. *The body is not seen as a distinct part of man but rather it expresses his whole person.* When Christ gives up His body for our salvation, He is giving up His whole person, not some outer part of Himself. In the popular culture we have so successfully superimposed the Greek notion on the Bible that grasping the Biblical view of the body could well be difficult. And in our culture we have adopted the Greek view wholesale: we treat the body as though it does not really matter to whom we truly are as human persons or to what we do in or with our bodies; we view the body as unconnected to the "essential me" inside it. To think this way is already to be far from the Biblical mindset. The Greek/modern and Biblical perspectives are not complementary, they are contradictory; they are totally different views of man and the body. They cannot be conflated and ought not to be confused.

Thus the true Biblical notion of the resurrection as immortality of the whole man (that is, the integral person) after death comes out of the general view of man as a creature who is essentially a unity of being who stands in relationship to God and his fellow man in his animated bodily life. This will become clear as we proceed. The second most important point follows on the first: the Biblical terms commonly translated into English by "body", "spirit", "flesh", etc. must be understood in their Biblical (Semitic) meanings and nuances rather than in Greek ones, or in the modern cultural and psychologically loaded ways of contemporary parlance. The business

of translating these terms accurately and consistently is extremely complex. Certain nuances and distinctions have to be carefully kept in view. One simply cannot accept English terms with all their inherent modern baggage without qualifications as having the equivalent and correct Biblical meaning. With this said, let us turn to key Biblical terms for man, but first a basic lesson in Biblical anatomy.

In the Old Testament, certain parts of the anatomy have attributed to them certain functions, as is true for us. For example, modern man thinks with his head, emotes with his heart. For the Old Testament view, basically just move everything down a foot or so.⁶ So, Biblical man thinks with his heart, feels with his gut, and makes love with his feet! Does Biblical man use his head? Not in the sense we moderns do. For Biblical man, it is not the seat of intelligence. Does Biblical man have a heart? Yes, but not in the way we moderns do. To have a heart in the Old Testament basically means to have intelligence. The heart is not the seat of emotion, the viscera are. So, Biblical man feels with his kidneys and liver. And yes, Biblical man makes love with his feet. (This is obviously a euphemism.) The New Testament anatomy is not essentially different from the Old Testament, though in certain ways it is more specific. The Biblical understanding of physiology is not the modern one; there is no understanding of the brain or of the blood in connection to the heart, and there is no modern psychology, though the term *psychē* is used. This is not to say that the Biblical physiological view is inadequate; it is just not scientific. Biblical man looked at his body differently than we moderns do. Yet, the Biblical anthropology does not contradict our experience and neither is it simplistic. To associate intelligence with the heart makes good sense, as does associating emotion with the gut: butterflies in the stomach, and when one is angry where does he feel it? The Biblical correspondence of particular functions with specific parts of the anatomy was based on human bodily experience. We must be careful not to judge Biblical man's view by our technical, scientific outlook. To do so is to treat the Biblical culture as though it were somehow inadequate – or to consider Biblical man as stupid. The Biblical view of man has much to offer our self-alienating materialistic culture.

The Biblical anatomy most importantly, however, must be understood in its full import: man is not viewed as having bodily parts per se; rather, his bodily parts are the seat of certain activities that express his whole person, *so that terms do not really designate parts of the body so much as the whole person as seen from various perspectives of man's entire personality*. Throughout the Bible man is not viewed as an independent self-determining individual with rights. He is viewed *only* in relation to God and his fellow man. His true identity, therefore, comes not from his

self-consciousness but from his relationship to the community and to God. His destiny and life are worked out only in this context. For the Biblical mindset, man is saved or damned as a people. An individual is called as a prophet, priest, sage, or king to serve his people, not for personal gain. So man is both essentially corporeal and corporate. Biblical man views himself as an animated body created by God and necessarily communal because of the way he is made. Thus, there is no "I" apart from other human beings or God and the body is integral to expressing the person.⁷

II. Biblical Terminology of the Body

Now let us turn to examining briefly some of the more important various Biblical terms relevant to a theology of the body. Ideally each individual use of a term should be examined in its context and for nuance, but that is not possible here.⁸ A word of caution is spoken against just taking what is said here and applying it to specific English texts without first examining the underlying original Hebrew and Greek. There are many nuances, ambiguities and specific usages in the original Biblical texts that are often not reflected in the English translation. It will become clear that what the Bible means by various terms is not what modern Americans mean; so let it be reiterated: one should be careful of thinking that the English translations of the Bible can be accepted without proper qualification as having equivalent meaning to that of the Biblical mindset, or that one can impose the modern English meaning of the terms on the Bible's use of them.

A. Body

Scripture has no word denoting only the body as a separate and distinct component from the soul/spirit. In fact, Biblical Hebrew has no word which literally designates the living human body.⁹ This striking fact alone should already open our eyes to the fact that the Bible does not share the modern or Greek view of man. Biblical man does not view his body as one part of himself that is distinct from the rest of him. He is, however, a totality with bodily parts and organs which are the seat of psychic and physical activities by which he expresses himself and acts in relation to God and his fellow man. Instead of designating man as "body and soul" as Greeks or modern Americans would, when Biblical man speaks of man in his whole living constitution he says "flesh and *nephesh*" (e.g., Ps 16:9-10 in Heb.). Biblical man does not possess a body and a soul, rather he is both flesh and *nephesh* full of life and activity. In the Bible, the living human body is not abstracted from the whole man. Perhaps it is obvious to point out that, for the Bible, man in his bodily life is a creature created by God.

Male and female God created him. The fact of gender will mean that man is only fully man in community.

In the New Testament the Greek word *sōma* is used to designate the living human body. But this Greek term *sōma* has to be understood in a Semitic sense, not in a Hellenistic one. It is better to understand *sōma* not simply as the human body, but even as "self". Man does not possess a *sōma*; he is *sōma*.¹⁰ For the New Testament, as in the Old, any description of man's body is not for man in himself but in his relationship to God or human persons. Even in the New Testament the term *sōma* does not designate a distinct part of man's constitution; the New Testament understands that in his body the whole man comes to eternal life or damnation.¹¹ Fundamentally, the New Testament has the same view of the body as does the Old. Always in the Old and the New Testaments the body is seen either as good or as something neutral, since it is created by God.¹² *Essentially, in the biblical view, there is no human existence, now or hereafter, for man without a body.*

Jesus Himself obviously had a "Biblical-Semitic" view of the body. When He healed the sick or cast out demons, He effected cures of the whole person. There are numerous examples of Jesus healing the body and in doing so forgiving sins. Neither did He ignore the body and treat it as unimportant to human life, nor did He see it as separate from the whole person, as a mere outer shell unconnected to the real man. To heal it was also to heal the whole person, especially in terms of liberating man from sin and death. To heal the body, especially of diseases or conditions like blindness or crippledness that rendered a person unclean and barred him from worship in the temple, meant not only restoring a person's whole life in himself, but restoring him to community life and worship of God. Jesus' treatment of man in his bodily existence exhibits the prevailing Biblical view of the body: that it is in the body man is wholly a person, expressing himself, in relation to neighbor and God. The New Testament speaks of Jesus offering up His body in sacrifice: it can only mean that He offers His whole self in His body (cf. Heb 10:5, 10; 13-11 understood; 1 Pet 2:24, and the Institution Narratives).¹³ All in all, Biblical man is not even a dichotomy of "body and soul," but a unified whole being expressed bodily.

B. Flesh

In the Bible, the term flesh (in Hebrew *basar*, and in Greek *sarx*) has a range of meaning. The most fundamental meaning relevant to this investigation is that flesh is used to refer to man's weakness and mortality, particularly in relation to God (cf. Gen 6:3, 12f; Deut 5:23; Ps 65:3).¹⁴ Flesh is never applied to God as so many of man's bodily parts are in anthropomorphism: it clearly refers to bodily creatures made by God.

Animals have flesh, but what makes the difference is man is created in the image of God. Overall, in the Old Testament, flesh is not thought of as a material component of man opposed to his spirit, rather it designates man's nature as weak and corruptible.

New Testament usage does not differ fundamentally from that of the Old, though in John and Paul there will be their respective nuances. Flesh is not quite synonymous with the body and not merely a material substance of man's composition; it refers to his concrete historical existence in weakness and sin, in contrast to God. Flesh is not simply a part of man; it refers to his corporeality in contrast to God's non-corporeality and therefore his limitation in understanding the divine and being bound to the human. The Bible has no notion of getting rid of the flesh and then living as a "true spirit"; flesh is an integral component of man's constitution. When Paul speaks of the resurrected body he explains that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 15:50). He is not denying the resurrection of the complete man, but rather explaining that the risen man will not be subject to corruption, sin, and worldliness.¹⁵

John too sees the flesh in opposition to the spirit. But John's usage is different in nuance from Paul's. John has no notion that the flesh is sinful. For John, flesh simply denotes the earthly sphere in contrast to the heavenly, spiritual one. The flesh designates what is human. It is earthly and lowly and the one who lives in it takes on its character, but it is not something bad or sinful in itself. The Son of Man became flesh so as to draw all of man (individually and as a race) into the glory of the Father.

In John, the preexistent Logos became flesh: "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14). In this climax of the Logos hymn, John conveys that the divine glory is now visible in the flesh, in the humanity the Son assumes. It is no mere disguise, this flesh: the Word *became* flesh. He pitched His tent among us, literally, that is, He took on human nature in its full reality. John uses flesh to indicate the total human reality of the Incarnation. Jesus is not masquerading as a human being with a mere external appearance of a man; He became a concrete individual man.

C. Soul

The English word "soul" is most often used to translate either the Hebrew *nephesh* or the Greek *psychē*. It is most unfortunate that "soul" is used to translate the Old Testament term *nephesh*; its distinctly Hellenistic overtones even in modern parlance cannot convey what the underlying Hebrew means. In modern American thinking, "soul" denotes a distinct and purely spiritual vital principle that is imperishable in itself apart from any divine action. This of course is also the basic Hellenistic notion.¹⁶ This is not the Hebrew notion of the word that underlies the English "soul"

in English translation. In fact, such a concept is completely foreign to the Bible. The difficulty is that the modern American notion (or the strictly Hellenistic one) of "soul" has been superimposed on the Biblical text, so that when Christians who are uncritical of the culture hear it they cannot recognize the authentic Biblical view.

Nephesh is an important Biblical concept. To understand this concept is to begin to grasp the Biblical anthropology in its distinctiveness. Man is constituted as a *nephesh*: "then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen 2:7), i.e., *nephesh hayyāh*. This text indicates that *nephesh* refers to man only once he begins to live; it is not "breath of life" but man as whole living being.¹⁷ Man is a living *nephesh*. Sometimes *nephesh* is best translated as "life", but *nephesh* must not be understood as a principle of life that survives mortality. *Nephesh* itself lives rather than serves as the principle of life. When one's life is threatened, it is the *nephesh* that survives; an attack on one's *nephesh* is an attack on one's life. To risk one's *nephesh* is to risk one's life. A common oath formula is "as your *nephesh* lives." *Nephesh* departs at death, but it does not survive apart from the body as a living reality (cf. Gen 35:18; 1 Kgs 1:21f Job 11:20; Jer 15:19).¹⁹

Nephesh is distinguished from flesh but it is not thought of as non-carnal in the sense in which for the Greek the spirit is opposed to the flesh, because the *nephesh* shares in the experiences of fleshly man (cf. Job 14:22; 30:16, Pss 42:55, 77; 131:2).¹⁹ In many cases, *nephesh* is best translated as "self" or by the personal pronoun, so closely is it associated with the person (cf. Gen 49:6; Num 23:10). Often in the Psalms, the one who prays asks for deliverance of his *nephesh*, that is, himself, from death (Sheol; Pss 16:10; 30:4; 49:16; 86:13; 89:49). *Nephesh* can simply mean "person": see, for example, Gen 46:27, "all the *persons* (often translated "souls") of the house of Jacob that went down into Egypt were 70."²⁰

Nephesh is also the seat of appetites, including carnal ones, like hunger or thirst. *Nephesh* cannot be reduced to the English word "soul"! Rather, it designates the self precisely as a conscious living subject of action and passion, as distinct from other persons. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" in Luke 1:46, is in the Old Testament mindset of saying "I proclaim".... *nephesh* is a surrogate for the self.²² Man in his *nephesh* is no abstraction, but a vital living being, a self-conscious subject. Thus sometimes *nephesh* is better translated as "person" or "I".

Psychē in the New Testament is what is usually underlying the English word "soul" in the translations. Like *nephesh*, it is used to designate not just some vital principle of man in his physical life, but denotes a living being, a living person. It expresses man in his vital

consciousness, intelligence and willing. It has little to do with modern psychological notions. All in all, the New Testament *psychē* is not fundamentally different from the Old Testament *nephesh*.

Psychē goes beyond the *nephesh* in that it is the object of eternal salvation or damnation. This is not really a problem, since there is no developed notion of immortality in the Old Testament. For the New Testament, *psychē* refers to the self or whole person that goes to eternal life or death. Man can kill the body but only God can destroy the *psychē*, i.e., the whole person (cf. Mt 10:28 and Heb 10:39).

D. Spirit

The English "spirit" is *rûah* in the Hebrew and *pneuma* in the Greek. In the Old Testament, spirit is mostly applied to God. It also, as does *pneuma*, mean breath, wind. The spirit belongs to the Lord alone and is merely communicated to living beings, man and beast. *There is no conception in the Bible of spirit as soul.* Man's spirit is given by God and taken back by Him. It does not survive death. It is a vital principle in man and is basically contrasted to the flesh, though not usually in a pejorative way in the Old Testament (cf. Gen 6:3; Isa 38:16). When God takes it away, a living being dies. When He sends it forth they are created (Ps 104:29-30).²²

In the New Testament, spirit is used in the same way as it is in the Old. Paul, of course, sees it in contrast to the flesh, and thereby emphasizes a usage found in the Old. Where he goes beyond the Semitic notion is in his idea of the spirit as the principle of good actions as opposed to sinful flesh. But that is consistent with the basic outlook of the Christian in the New Testament: spiritual man is contrasted to fleshly man: "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26:41; Mk 14:39). It can be used to refer to the self "My spirit rejoices in God my savior: (Luke 1:47). Spirit departs at death (Mt 27:50); it is not an independent vital principle that lives on after the body is dead.

E. Heart and Mind

Heart and mind are paired here because in the Biblical anthropology man's seat of reason is the heart. In the New Testament, both heart (*kardia*) and mind (*nous*) are used, though the latter is rare and appears to be roughly synonymous with the former. Once again, the English translations lead one astray. In English the Biblical man does so much with his heart that one might get the impression he has no head. And unless the nuances are properly caught in the translation, one might think Biblical man is irrational. Wolff describes "heart", (Hebrew *lēb[ab]*) as "the most important word in the vocabulary of Old Testament anthropology."²³ All

together it occurs 858 times and is the most common of all anthropological terms.²⁴ It is applied almost exclusively to man. *As with other anatomical functions, the heart is always viewed not as a part of man, but as an expression of his whole self, in relation to God and neighbor.* Biblical man thought of the heart as the central organ of the anatomy. Remember, the brain is not known as such. In the Bible, the heart's functions correspond to what we attribute to the brain, but is not quite limited to just a neurological center.

The heart is hidden, inaccessible. Only God can know it (Jer 17:9; Ps 44:21).²⁵ The activity of the heart is mental and spiritual. The heart does also know emotion: it is the seat of joy and grief, courage and fear, the heart desires. But by far, the greatest usage in reference to the heart is in its intellectual capacity; in what we normally ascribe to the brain (cf. Deut 29:3; Prov 15:14; Ps 90:12; Job 8:10).²⁶ The heart has the capacity for perception and is the treasury of knowledge (cf. Solomon, 1 Kgs 3:9-12). What Solomon asks for is what we moderns would call an insightful mind. Jacob literally "stole the heart of Laban", not in terms of romantic "love" (!), but rather, he concealed from Laban what he intended to do (Gen 31:20). A "lack of heart" is a lack of thought (Prov 10:13; 24:30). When Delilah complains that Samson's heart is not with her, she means he does not share his secret knowledge with her.²⁷

The Lord demands that Israel keep the commandments ever in mind. Moses warns them never to forget them: Deut 6:5 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart (*lebab*) and with all your soul (*nephesh*), and with all your might (*me'ōd*)" (and cf. Deut 6:6 "lay these commands on your heart this day"). Thinking takes place in the heart (1 Sm 9:20; 25:25; Hag 1:5): "David said in his heart, 'I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul'" (1 Sm 27:1). Abraham "said in his heart 'shall a child be born to man who is a 100....'" (Gen 17:17). Ps 14:1 "the fool says in his heart, There is no god...." The man with a heart is the wise man, not the man of feeling (Job 34:10; 12:3). Job, speaking to his three faux amis says: "No doubt you are the people and wisdom will die with you. But I have understanding as well as you," literally: "Also to me a *heart* as to you" (Job 12:2-3).²⁸

Because of the heart's capacity for judgment and perception, it is the seat of the will. So man plans in his heart (Prov 16:9; Gen 6:5). He has a conscience (1 Sm 24:6): David's heart smote him, or in Ps 51:10 "a 'pure heart' create for me." To "speak his heart" is to move one to a decision (cf. Judg 19:3). To circumcise the heart is to turn wholeheartedly to the Lord, with sincere and pure intentions (cf. Jer 3:10). Wine and whoredom impair judgment, that is, they "take away the heart" (Prov 6:32; Hos 4:11). One who has never thought has never entered the heart (Jer 7:3). Jeremiah sees

the new covenant written on the heart, that is, understood by the mind and accepted by personal decision (31:31f).²⁹

Thus the heart represents life in its totality. In the New Testament, the heart is much the same as in the Old Testament.³⁰ It is the seat of intelligence and the source of thought and desire. For Paul, heart "connotes the more responsive and emotional reactions of the intelligent, planning self."³¹ For Paul "mind" (*nous*) describes man as a knowing and judging being, in his deductive capacity.³² There is really no difference from Paul's use of these terms and the Old Testament usage of *leb(ab)*.³³

F. Viscera and Feet

In the Old Testament, deep and violent emotion is attributed to the inner organs – especially the liver, bowels, and kidneys, the "guts", so that they are considered the seat of emotions. Violent grief or great joy are registered in the kidneys: See Ps 73:21 "... I was pricked in my kidneys"; or Prov 23:16 reads "My kidneys (usually translated "soul") will rejoice." Lam 3:13-5, in a context of great lamentation, reads: "He drove into my kidneys the arrows of his quiverHe has filled me with bitterness."

The liver and other viscera are used to speak of measureless grief: e.g., in Lam 2:11 "my eyes are spent with weeping; my innermost parts (*mē'im*) are in turmoil. "My liver (*kābēd*; usu. Translated "heart") is poured out on the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people." Also these organs are the seat of great joy: Ps 16:9; "therefore my heart (*lēb*) rejoices and my liver (*kābēd*) is glad."³⁴

In the New Testament *splangchnon* (viscera, "guts") is used to describe the strongest human emotions possible. It is used also of God's eschatological mercy: see Lk 1:78 (in the Benedictus) "tender mercy of our God." The verb form is used frequently in the New Testament (*splanghnizōmai*), especially in the parables of Jesus, e.g. Lk 15: 20: "but while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had *compassion*." In Lk 10:33 the good Samaritan "showed compassion."³⁵ Paul, strongly playing appealing on emotion, says to Philemon, "I have derived much joy and comfort from your love ... because *the guts* of the saints have been refreshed through you" (7). I am sending him back to you, sending my *very guts*" (12); and (20) "refresh *my guts* in Christ!"³⁶ The word is used for the whole person in the depths of emotional life. Having viscera is also a reference to having a particular Christian virtue, see Eph 4:32 and 1 Pet 3:8, usually translated by having a "tender heart."

In Isaiah's inaugural vision, the six-winged seraphim used two wings "to cover their feet." Also in Isa 7:20 we read: "in that day the Lord will shave with a razor which is hired ... the head and the hair of the feet, and it will sweep away the beard also." Both Isaiah texts contain an obvious

euphemism for the male genitalia, both address concerns of modesty. So, it is not going too far to say that Biblical man makes love with his feet.

There is also that passage in Exod 4:25 where the Lord seeks to kill Moses but Zipporah "took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it" thus transferring circumcision of her son to Moses. But the best example is that of Ruth 3:7-9, which is both ambiguous and evocative: "when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart (*lēb*) was merry, he went to lie down ...Then Ruth came softly, and 'uncovered his feet' and lay down...the man was startled and turned over and beheld a woman lay at his feet!" When asked who she was, Ruth replied and asked him to "spread your skirt over your maidservant for you are next of kin", an expression which means to take as wife. Ruth obviously encourages Boaz to exercise the right of next of kin!

G. Blood

In Hebrew, blood is *dām* (*dāmîm*) and *haima* in Greek. Biblical man seems to have had no understanding of the physiology of blood. Blood is not associated with intellectual, social, or emotional life. So he does not have "rich or blue blood" and his blood does not boil, as modern blood does. But Biblical man certainly understood that "the life is in the blood." Blood is often paired with *nephesh*, not heart. According to Lev 17:14; Deut 12:23, "The *nephesh* (life) of all flesh is its blood." To pour out blood is a way of expressing death (Gen 9:6).³⁷ Blood is considered the seat of vital physical life and, along with flesh, connotes a living being. The *nephesh* was thought to be in the blood because when the blood ran out of a being, so did the *nephesh*.³⁸

An important distinction for Biblical theology is that the blood was given in sacrifice to God not to atone but to effect purification; it is applied to the offerer. It could do so because it was so closely associated with life. In sacrifice blood represents the life, which is symbolically offered to God. The only significant difference between the Old and New Testaments on blood is that in the New the blood of Christ is "real drink" to be consumed (cf. John 6). Blood is an important element in sacrifice and in making of covenants (cf. the Passover Lamb, Exodus 19 and 24 and the New Testament Covenant in Christ's Blood, in the Institution Narratives especially).³⁹ There is no expiation of sin without blood (cf. Rom 3:25; Heb 9:22).

III. Implications for the Culture of the Biblical View of the Body

From this evidence on the Biblical view of the body, we can draw three fundamental conclusions about the Biblical foundation for a theology

of the body. Then we will conclude by suggesting some implications of reclaiming the authentic Biblical-Christian view of the body for our culture.

1. Man is obviously a bodily creature, more than the beasts but less than God. If Biblical man understands that he is made in the image of God it is not because he sees God as having a body, but rather that in man's corporeality he is like God. The Biblical anthropomorphizing of God is not to make God like man so much as to suggest that man is like God. Man is like God in that he is incorporeal; he is like the beasts in that he is corporeal. But there is no dichotomy in man. For the Bible, man is not a body and a soul. While man's anatomy is described and various parts of it have certain functions ascribed to them, man is *not* a composite being. Though he has bodily parts they are not constituent, rather they are constitutive of man. That is to say, the essence of the whole person is expressed in these various activities which correspond to various parts of the anatomy. In the Biblical view, man is a unity of being, a mysterious corporeal incorporeality. Man is always viewed in his entirety of conscious life, even when ascribing specific functions of his anatomy, for the whole person is then identified with the organ or part being referred to.⁴⁰

2. The body is not an object of consideration for its own sake; it is always viewed in terms of how a person relates to God and neighbor. The Biblical view is thoroughly Semitic, even for Paul. Paul and other New Testament authors may have specific nuances not found in the Old Testament but that is so as to describe the new life in Christ, which was based on the early Church's experience of Him in the Holy Spirit. Man is not defined by his bodily or material world, but by his relation to God and man. Man's corporeal incorporeality can separate him from God and neighbor or bring him closer. For the Bible, man is saved or damned in his entirety; he is a concrete historical being, not an abstraction.

3. The Biblical anthropology clearly is a sacramental one. That is to say, that for Biblical man, the body (with its various constitutive parts) is a sign and instrument of the essence of the whole person. The reality of man is symbolized in the various functions and activities attributed to the body and its parts. The self, the whole person, is signified by the body and its part. The body and its part are the means of expressing the whole person. There is no separation of the body from the man: the body is not a mere outward reality but a real visible integral symbol of the whole person. Thus the "feet" or "heart" can effectively express the whole self.

Conclusion

The Biblical foundation for a theology of the body has manifold implications for reclaiming an authentic Christian theology of the body. A

few very brief observations will be made here. The Biblical view of the body points to a particular attitude about human growth and aging, sexuality, celibacy, chastity, marriage, and reproduction.⁴¹ The Biblical view of the body likewise points to a particular meaning to suffering and death, especially in Christ. The Biblical view of the body is part of the radical eschatological ethics demanded of the Christian, not simply because we will be judged according to what we have done in the body (cf. 2 Cor 5:10), but because Jesus demands a righteousness characterized by an interior holiness that is expressed bodily in our relation to God and neighbor.⁴² The Covenant God made with his people in the Old Testament, beginning with Abraham and coming to fullness in Moses, was symbolized by the bodily sign of circumcision. The New Testament covenant, made in Christ's blood, also has as its primary symbol something bodily, namely, the Body of Christ.

The true Biblical-Christian view of the resurrection of the body may prove problematic at first for modern American Christians. First, it implies that the dead are awakened by God's power alone. This means we must trust God to do so. We must admit our human limitation; we still cannot defeat death and serious illness. If there is a corporeal immortality, then God really must effect it. Many American Christians seem to have lost sight of this countercultural hope because the popular culture teaches us to trust only in ourselves and our technology. Second, if the Biblical view of the body implies that man's ultimate hope is that as a whole person in his full humanity he will live eternally, then, that has implications for how we treat the body now. It is, therefore, not unimportant to who we are as persons now and how we begin now to treat the animated body of our neighbor and relate to God in and with it. This has obvious implications for our youth, but also for the ultimate Christian meaning of suffering and death. It is countercultural to view the body as the means of expressing who we are essentially as persons, and therefore to take seriously our bodily activity and how we treat it.

Third, the Greek notion of immortality is that the soul does not need a god to give it imperishability since it is by nature immortal, and that the body is a hindrance to eternal bliss. The authentic Biblical-Christian view is that man's immortal happiness is that of the whole person. So, his body is essential to who he is as a person. God, therefore, must resurrect it from dust and ashes for man to be fully human in the afterlife. Nowadays this reality often seems like something too fantastic – or mere “mythology”⁴³ – to most, practical, materialist American Christians. Since our bodies are essential to the expression of our personhood, it implies further that heaven is communal. We will still be relating to God and neighbor in our bodies in the next world. Most American Christians think that heaven is a strictly

"me and Jesus" deal, or maybe it includes those we love. But to think that man's true nature is only perfected in communion and in his full, animated bodily personhood is perhaps countercultural. Having bodies (and gender) implies that our humanity is necessarily communal and that our personhood is only expressed in and through our bodies. If that is true in this life, it is more so – perfected – in the next.⁴⁴ That the risen Christ sits at the Father's Right Hand in His full glorified humanity, complete with a glorified human body, means that God loves man in his complete humanity so profoundly as to assume it forever. That may shock most of our youth: that God loves their bodies! It may surprise some American Christians to discover that God thinks the human body worth redeeming; so much so in fact, He takes the body into His inner life eternally. This authentic Biblical-Christian view further implies what great dignity the body has: it cannot be ignored, abused, treated as a mere shell unconnected to the person, or idolized, and it cannot be wantonly destroyed, even when it is sick.

Thus the Biblical portrayal of man is that he is an animated body, created and redeemed by God. It is his flesh the Son of God assumed and his body in which the Son of Man died and rose up again. The Biblical view of man clearly expresses a sacramentality of the body: the body including all its anatomical functions is for Biblical man the sign and instrument of the whole person. Lastly, man's body is sacred because it is given him by God, is essential to man's being like God, is assumed and raised up by the Son of God and is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

This paper's aim was to lay a Biblical foundation for a theology of the body so as to move toward reclaiming the authentic Biblical-Christian view. The hope is that the Christian churches can re-establish the Biblical-Christian view of the body and the resurrection so as to help our youth in particular distinguish the true Christian teaching from that mistakenly identified in the popular culture as that teaching. The ultimate goal, of course, in doing so is to help our youth live in an integrated Christian way, which many really do want to do, if only they are taught how. The authentic Biblical-Christian, countercultural view of the body is perhaps still best summed up by St Paul:

...we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while

we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh (2Cor 4:7-12).

References

1. Of course, what the students mean by "spiritual entity" is quite vague – but that is part of the point! They are convinced that resurrection of the dead means only some impersonal amorphous spiritual immortality. I often ask the same of catechists, or Joe and Jane Parishioner, even the adult candidates in the catechumenate originally from other mainstream Christian churches, and still I usually get a similar answer. Sadly, many college seminarians I have talked with think that the Frank de Capra theology is the Catholic teaching on immortality. Many Christians mistakenly think, too, that the Biblical-Christian view is that the body is intrinsically bad.
2. So much so that I have been accused of making it up or of being "a heretic"!
3. In this view, which is essentially Gnostic, two extremes are manifest: either the body can be denigrated and largely ignored as something in the way, or it is put on a pedestal and therefore the sole object of one's concern. This latter manifestation is of course a sort of escape. (In America this latter view is often coupled with the fascination of the superficial image of the body beautiful.) In both extremes, since the body is a mere outer shell, suffering and pain are to be avoided at all costs. Thus, suffering in the body has no value.
4. It is ironic that so many of our Christian students will drink bottled water, eat vegetarian, work out daily, but also will, for example, smoke, get drunk on a regular basis, fornicate, or take the contraceptive pill. Many do not recognize the inherent contradiction in this lifestyle until it is pointed out to them. Yet, in living in this self-conflicted way they seem to acknowledge implicitly that the body is constitutive of the whole person.
5. The time may be ripe in reclaiming the authentic Biblical-Christian view of the body and the resurrection because of so many popular movements toward holistic medicine and lifestyles.
6. This rule was first articulated to me by my teacher, Bro. Aloysius Fitzgerald, F.S.C.

7. Incidentally, Pope John Paul II's theology of the body is very consistent with the Biblical theology of the body: when he speaks of being able to tell the truth or lie with one's body, he sees man in his bodily activity very much as the Bible sees him. Of course, his theology of the nuptial meaning of the body is likewise Biblically rooted.

8. It is not within the scope of this paper to be exhaustive, since there is an enormous body of material relevant to the subject (just in the Bible alone!). Only representative examples will be provided here.

9. For the fundamental data on various key words used here in A through G, like "Body", "Soul", etc., the author has consulted, *ad loc*: H.W. Wolff *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1974); J.L. McKenzie, S.J., *Dictionary of the Bible* (Bruce Publishing: Milwaukee, 1965); *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ABD; 6 vols.; Doubleday: Garden City, NY, 1992); *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement* (IDBS; Abingdon: Nashville, 1962); *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT; 10 vols.; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1964-76; see the index in vol. X for the English equivalents of the Greek); *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (TDOT; 5 vols.; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1974--); and the (New) *Jerome Biblical Commentary* ([N]JBC; Prentice-Hall: Englewood, NJ, 1968 and 1990); see the index, various topical articles and commentary on various Biblical texts. For Paul, see the article on "Pauline Theology" by J.A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *NJBC* 82, or the handy *Pauline Theology, A Brief Sketch* (Prentice-Hall: Englewood, NJ 1967). My references are to the latter version, which is extracted from the *JBC* version.

10. See J.A. Fitzmyer *Luke X-XXIV* (AB 28A Doubleday: garden City; 1985) 1399; he is quoting Bultmann.

11. See TDNT, s.v. "sōma." For further specifics, see this same entry.

12. This is also true of Paul. See Fitzmyer, "Pauline Theology." Where the New Testament seems to go beyond the Old in regard to speaking of the human body is when Paul speaks of the sōma in a pejorative sense with regard to "desires or passions" (cf. Rom 6:6, 12; 8:13). [Fitzmyer, *Pauline*, 61]. What Paul really means in these cases, according to Fitzmyer, is the *whole man* under the sway of some power like sin or death – personified. In these instances sōma is the sin-ruled self (cf. Rom 7:23); this self is the condition of man without Christ [Ibid.]. In general, for Paul, body belongs either to Christ or to other powers (sin, death). For Paul, the terms *sōma*, *sarx*, *psychē*, *pneuma*, *kardia*, and *nous* "do not really designate parts of man but designate, rather, aspects of the whole man as seen from different perspectives." [Ibid.].

13. The New Testament also uses "body" in a metaphorical and mystical sense to speak of the Church and of the Eucharist. These senses are not within the scope of this investigation.

14. So McKenzie, s.v. "flesh."

15. When most people think of Paul and the flesh they think of his viewing the flesh in opposition to the spirit. Going beyond the Old Testament, then, Paul sees flesh as the seat of concupiscence or worldly tendencies, and is man's natural condition. [Fitzmyer, *Pauline*, 62.] Flesh connotes evil self-dependency. Sin originates in the flesh not because of sensual temptations, but because one seeks salvation in trusting it. In this way Paul develops the Old Testament fundamental notion that flesh is dependent on God, the natural condition of man, but fleeting. Man in his flesh must turn to God for salvation. [IDBS, s.v. "Flesh in the NT".]

16. Somehow even the medieval and Thomistic notions of the immortal soul seem to have been lost by many modern American Christians, seemingly as a result of confusing and conflating the Hellenistic notion of immortality with that of the authentic Biblical-Christian view.

17. See McKenzie, s.v., "soul."

18. See Wolff, 10-25, upon which this material relies.

19. See McKenzie, s.v. "soul", for this point and for what immediately follows.

20. I owe this insight to Edward G. Mathews, Jr., Ph.D.

21. Compare, Ps 103: 1 "Bless the Lord O my *nephesh*" or Ps 42: 5 "why are you cast down, O my *nephesh*..." Of course, the Greek of Lk 1:46 is *psychē*.

22. McKenzie, s.v., "spirit." See also Wolff, 32-9.

23. Wolff, 40.

24. Ibid.

25. Wolff, 44. This section relies on Wolff, 40-55.

26. Wolff, 47.

27. She could also mean he does not love her. But remember, she is a harlot and she is willingly being used to get Samson for the Philistines.

28. See Wolff, 40-55.

29. Ibid.

30. See e.g., Mt 12:34; Mk 7:21; 11:23; Jn 12:40; AA 7:23; 28:27; 2 Cor 5:12.

31. Fitzmyer, *Pauline* 63.

32. Ibid.

33. See Fitzmyer, *Pauline*, for the full exposition of the Pauline anthropology, upon which I have relied.

34. Wolff, 64. See Wolff 63-66, upon which I have relied for material for this section.

35. TDNT, vol. VII, s.v., "splangchnon," for the full exposition of this material. I have relied on it for this section.

36. The use of "guts" is my emphasis.

37. Wolff, 61.

38. McKenzie, s.v., "blood."

39. On the sacredness of blood, see especially Lev 17: 1-16. It is not within the scope of this paper to treat these texts.

40. "My mouth will declare your praise" (Ps 51: 15) is another fine example of this: the whole person is meant and represented by the part of the anatomy that actually utters the praise.

41. It is obvious that any Christian ethic must be built on the authentic Biblical view of the body and not on the popular cultural view of what is mistaken to be the Biblical-Christian view.

42. Just look at the whole Sermon on the Mount and its emphasis on the morality of the person as expressed in what he does in his body, with the whole person represented in only one of his bodily members!

43. I am using the term here in the popular American sense to mean "untrue", not in the proper Biblical genre sense.

44. See the exquisite discussion by J. Ratzinger [*Introduction to Christianity* (Herder and Herder: NY, 1969)], especially the section on "Two Major Questions: 2. The Resurrection of the Body". His exegesis is sound and his philosophical distinctions incisive and timely.